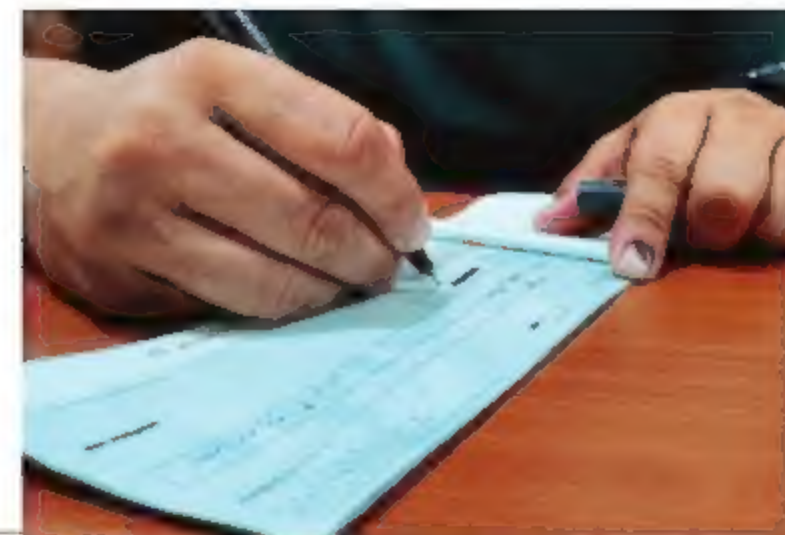




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SC NORMS FOR FAST DISPOSAL OF CHEQUE BOUNCE CASES

The SC on Friday issued a slew of directions for fast disposal of cheque-bounce cases, which have choked justice delivery system

NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENTS ACT TO BE AMENDED

The Supreme Court said there should be a single trial in multiple cheque-bounce cases, if transactions involved are the same. A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde asked the Centre to make suitable amendments in the Negotiable Instruments Act and recommended that cases lodged in 12 months time against a person be clubbed into one case

EVIDENCE THROUGH AFFIDAVIT

The apex court directed all high courts to issue guidelines for trial courts for speedy disposal of cheque bounce cases. The court also said the evidence in such cases can now be tendered by filing affidavits, and there would be no requirement to examine witnesses physically

30%

SHARE OF CHEQUE BOUNCE CASES IN TOTAL PENDENCY AT TRIAL COURTS & HIGH COURTS

Govt bid to ramp up oxygen and vax production, supply

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

FACED with an acute shortage of medical grade oxygen and vaccines in the wake of the massive second Covid wave that is nowhere near its peak, the Centre on Friday sought to ease all bottlenecks as part of its crisis management and step up their production.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did a comprehensive review of the oxygen situation and urged Union ministries and state governments to build synergy to address gaps in the system. The meeting came a day after the government decided to import 50,000 metric tonnes of oxygen after first claiming that there is enough production capacity within India to meet the demand.

To address vaccine shortage, the government sought to scale up production of the indigenous Covaxin, developed by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, by providing ₹65 crore aid to the company's unit in Bengaluru. It has already allowed Mumbai-based Haffkine Institute to produce Covaxin on technology transfer basis. Covaxin's share in the current vaccine pool is just about 15%, as the present capacity of Bharat Biotech is about one crore doses a month.

The Centre plans to increase production to two crore doses by May-June and by 6-7 crore by July-August, for which talks are on with at least two more companies - Indian Immunologicals Ltd, Hyderabad, and BICOL, Bulandshahr.

The meeting convened by the PM specifically took stock of the oxygen availability in 12 high burden states, including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. These states have already been allocated 4,880 MT, 5,619 MT and 6,593 MT for meeting their projected demand as on April 20, April 25 and April 30, respectively.

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Friday wrote to the state chief secretaries, advising free inter-state movement of oxygen carrying vehicles, saying no curb shall be imposed on oxygen manufacturers and suppliers to impose geographical limits on supplies.

Some saints camping in Haridwar for the Maha Kumbh were agitated after an akhanda claimed the mela would end on Saturday. A final decision will be taken by the Akhanda Parishad, the apex body of 13 akhadas. As of now, at least 50 seers have tested positive. They include Mahant Ravindra Puri of Niranjani Akhada, who had announced that his akhada will consider closure of the event on April 17.

NATIONWIDE	APRIL 15	APRIL 16
Fresh cases	2,00,739	2,17,353
Recoveries	93,528	1,18,302
Deaths	1,038	1,185

VARIANTS OF CONCERN

Of about 14,000 Covid samples whose whole genomic sequencing has been carried out, 1,189 tested positive for variants of concern, the Centre said on Friday



Covid victims being cremated at Swarnrekh Ghat in Ranchi on Friday | AP

MAHARASHTRA Aurangabad district administration has acquired the oxygen plant of R L Steel in Chitegaon of Pathan to produce nearly 500 medical grade oxygen cylinders per day

NEW DELHI IndiGo to waive fee to change time or date on domestic tickets that are booked between April 17 and April 30 due to Covid. However, cancellation fee will be chargeable

UTTAR PRADESH Full lockdown across all UP districts this Sunday

ANDHRA PRADESH Vaccine stock exhausted, just 4,300 doses could be administered on Friday, CM writes to Modi for 60 lakh more doses

O STATUS CHECK

MADHYA PRADESH Daily supply up from 130 MT to 295 MT. In 34 districts, 1,273 O₂ concentrators installed till date. Air Concentrator Units are being installed in 8 districts

BIHAR Govt claims oxygen availability is sufficient for the next 7-10 days. But private hospitals complain of oxygen scarcity

JHARKHAND Govt claims there is no shortage, but patients are facing problems in getting oxygen support. A special task force has been formed to address it

Lancet study recommends localised, phased curbs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Lancet Covid Commission India Task Force, in a report titled 'Managing India's Second Covid-19 Wave: Urgent Steps', released on Friday, suggested localised, phased restrictions or closures in the country, while not recommending a blanket national or state-wide lockdown. It said that the next two months can be used to prepare the education sector for safe opening of schools, colleges in July 2021 for the next academic year.

FULL REPORT: P4

CM back in hospital with reinfection of Covid-19

Hours earlier, he chaired emergency meet; was due for 2nd vax dose

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

A day after he returned midway from campaigning for the Bengal Lok Sabha seat bypoll, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa was admitted to a private hospital in Bengaluru on Friday following re-infection of Covid-19. Incidentally, just hours before he tested positive for the Novel Coronavirus, the 78-year-old CM had chaired an emergency meeting to discuss the Covid-19 situation in Karnataka.

Yediyurappa had been campaigning for the upcoming bypolls in Karnataka till Thursday afternoon. He had developed fever and fatigue three days ago during campaigning and had tested negative for Covid-19 two days ago, but continued to have fever.

Following the CM's hospitalisation, the all-party meeting on the Covid-19 situation, scheduled for Sunday, has been cancelled. "Upon having mild fever, I got tested for Covid-19 today and my report has come out positive. Although I am doing fine, I am being hospitalised on the advice of doctors. I request all those who have come in my contact recently to be observant and exercise self-quarantine," Yediyurappa tweeted.

He was first taken to M S Ramiah hospital on Friday morning and later shifted to Manipal Hospital. "A medical board of clinical experts has been instituted and currently, he is being evaluated and treated for respiratory symptoms," a statement said.

In August last year, the CM was hospitalised for a week due to Covid. He had taken the first dose of vaccination in March and was due for his second dose next week. "The CM seemed normal and enthusiastic in the morning meeting. We were to take the next vaccine dose in two or three days. He perhaps got reinfected during the poll campaign. We needed his leadership in the current situation but, unfortunately, he had to be hospitalised. He will continue to guide us from the hospital," said Dr K Sudhakar.

SENIOR MINISTERS WILL HOLD FORT

With Yediyurappa in hospital, Health minister Dr K Sudhakar said all meetings on Covid-19 etc., will be held under the leadership of senior ministers like Basavaraj Bommai, R Ashok and others. The CM will continue to monitor the Covid-19 situation from the isolation ward and will be in touch with the ministers and the chief secretary. Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar, as ordered by Yediyurappa earlier this month, will sign and announce all orders on restrictions, Covid-19 protocols, etc.

CURBS ON PUBLIC GATHERINGS

Mandatory implementation of 3.25 sqft distance per person

Events	Indoors	Outdoors
Weddings	100*	200
Birthdays	25	50
Funerals and related events	25	50

*Number of people allowed

Other private events - Not more than 50 persons	Political events - 200 permitted outdoors	Religious and cultural events are prohibited
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STATEWIDE

	APRIL 15	APRIL 16
Fresh cases	14,738	14,859
Active cases	96,561	1,07,315
Deaths	66	78
Recoveries	3,591	4,031
Fresh cases in Bengaluru Urban	10,497	9,917

K'taka now has over 1L active cases

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

WITH Karnataka recording its highest every single-day addition of Covid-19 cases with 14,859 fresh cases, the number of active cases in the state has breached the one lakh mark and now stands at 1,07,315. This is a 11.13 per cent jump from the 96,561 active cases on Thursday.

Karnataka is now ranked fourth among states with the highest number of active cases after Maharashtra (6,38,034), Uttar Pradesh (1,50,676) and Chhattisgarh (1,21,769). The state also recorded its highest number of deaths in a day with 78 added to the toll, taking it to 13,190 now.

Karnataka had last seen over one lakh active cases on October 21, 2020. The number had remained above that mark for 30 days from September 10, with only some days when it dipped marginally.

CONTINUED ON: P3

PANDEMIC EFFECT

Now, ICSE defers exams for Classes 10 and 12

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

TWO days after the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) cancelled its Class 10 board exams and deferred the Class 12 board exams, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) on Friday deferred the board exams of both Classes 10 and 12 in view of the rise in Covid-19 cases across the country.

The Class 10 and 12 exams, which were to be held from May 4, have been deferred in the light of the nationwide surge in coronavirus cases, the CISCE chief executive and secretary Gerry Arathoon said. "We will closely monitor the situation and review it in the first week of June to take a final decision on the conduct of examination," he said.

"While Class 12 exams will be conducted at a later stage, Class 10 students will get an option to either appear for offline exams later or get evaluated on the basis of fair and unbiased criteria to be developed by Board," Arathoon added.

Several state boards too have already postponed or cancelled their exams. Chief ministers of many states had been pushing for postponement of the examinations in the light of the prevailing Covid-19 situation.

EC bans rallies from 7pm to 10am in WB

PRONAB MONDAL @ Kolkata

IN the all-party meeting called by the Election Commission on Friday, there were no takers for the TMC's suggestion to club the remaining phases of the polls. However, keeping in view the serious Covid situation, the EC asked parties to religiously follow protocols. The poll panel warned them

of criminal action in case of violation of Covid guidelines.

"Candidates and political parties shall ensure absolute, repeat absolute, adherence to Covid guidelines..." the poll panel said in its order.

It asked star campaigners to tell their audience to wear masks in the beginning of the event itself and directed political

parties to provide masks and sanitisers to all those who come to attend rallies.

The EC cut short the time given for rallies and public meetings by banning them from 7 pm to 10 am. It also extended the silence period from 48 hours to 72 hours for the remaining three phases scheduled to be held on April 22, 26 and 29. Bengal reported 6,747 new cases in the past 24 hours.

P10

SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

Covid slams brakes on probe into sisters' deaths

MANJU SHETTA @ Bengaluru

THE Covid-19 pandemic may have played spoilsport with the investigation into the suspicious deaths of two elderly women siblings at their residence in Gopalapura on Magadi Road on Thursday. The women had no external injuries and nothing was stolen from their house.

Jamuna (62) and Raani (59) were found dead on Thursday evening after their worried younger sister Premarushed to their house when her repeated calls went unanswered. But the cause of their deaths may remain unsolved as they were found to be Covid-19 positive due to which an autopsy was not conducted. Only the food particles collected from their home have been sent for forensic analysis to check whether they had committed suicide by mixing poison in their food or not.

The preliminary investigation have revealed that no external injuries on them and even valuables, including cash and gold, were found intact, a police officer said.



Strangely, both women were found dead in two different rooms with no hint of an attack.

When their bodies were shifted to Victoria Hospital, their swab samples were first collected for Covid-19 tests. They were both found to be positive for Covid-19 and the hospital authorities did not conduct a postmortem as per the protocol. Besides, the doctors have not ruled out that the siblings may have died due to the disease itself - a strange possibility, considering that both were found dead in different rooms of their house. However, that cannot be verified now because they have already been cremated.

CONTINUED ON: P7

EXPRESS READ

UK approves Nirav's extradition to India

London: UK Home Secretary Priti Patel has signed off on the order to extradite fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India on fraud and money laundering charges related to the estimated \$2-billion Punjab National Bank scam case. P9

Ajay Seth is new Economic Affairs Secy

New Delhi: Ajay Seth, a 1987 batch IAS officer of Karnataka cadre, on Friday assumed charge as Secretary Economic Affairs at a time when the economy is being threatened by the second wave of Covid. Seth replaces Tarun Bajaj, who moved as Revenue Secretary in the Ministry of Finance.

US keeps India in currency watch list

Washington: The US on Friday placed 11 countries, including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Italy in the currency practices monitoring list. The other countries are Ireland, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Mexico

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